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More than 100 Members of Congress Urge Clinton and Indonesian President Habibie to Ease Concerns in East Timor

WASHINGTON—A bipartisan group of more than 100 Members of Congress sent two separate letters to President Clinton and Indonesian President Habibie calling for a just solution to the tragedy in East Timor, where as many as 200,000 people have perished from the combined effects of a war in that island territory.

The letters were originated by Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio) in an effort to help bring about a lasting settlement to the longstanding conflict in East Timor, which Indonesia invaded in 1975.

"At this crucial juncture in Indonesian history, it is vital that the United States take a strong position in support of East Timor and call on the Indonesian Government to honor past resolutions enacted by the United Nations," the lawmakers said in the letter to Clinton.

Both letters to Clinton and Habibie urged ending human rights abuses through "an immediate and substantial reduction in the Indonesian military presence in East Timor as well as the granting of freedom of speech and assembly."

The lawmakers called for the release of political prisoners, including Xanana Gusmao, the Timorese resistance leader who has been compared with Nelson Mandela.

The letters also underscored the need for a speedy resolution of the East Timor problem through the good offices of the United Nations, "based on the freely expressed wishes of the people of East Timor."

The letter to Clinton pointed out, "Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo, who received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1996...has stated that only through democratic means can a just and lasting political settlement be achieved in East Timor."

According to Hall, there has been more openness in East Timor's capital city in recent months since the fall of President Suharto.

"It is vital to continue the momentum that has been generated thus far, and there would be no better way to do that than to improve the human rights situation, withdraw troops, and release all political prisoners, especially Xanana Gusmao, who is crucial to any long-term solution to the problem," stressed Hall.

The lawmakers noted in their letter to Clinton, "It is an unfortunate fact that the invasion was carried out with American weaponry and diplomatic support."

"The United States should work with its allies to make clear to the new government that a speedy

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resolution to the East Timor problem through the good offices of the United Nations would be to the benefit of all," the lawmakers told Clinton.

In addition to Hall, key supporters of the letters were Reps. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), Chris Smith (R-N.J.), Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), John Edward Porter (R-Ill.), Patrick Kennedy (D-R.I.), Joseph Pitts (R-Pa.), and Barney Frank (D-Mass.).

The text of the letters follow:

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

For many years there has been increasing concern in the United States Congress over the tragic plight of the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, which was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. It is an unfortunate fact that the invasion was carried out with American weaponry and diplomatic support. As many as 200,000 people, or a third of the population, have perished from the combined effects of the Indonesian presence. At this crucial juncture in Indonesian history, it is vital that the United States take a strong position in support of East Timor and call on the Indonesian Government to honor past resolutions enacted by the United Nations.

For the past decade, Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo, who received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 and with whom you met last year, has stated that only through democratic means can a just and lasting political settlement be achieved in East Timor. There is now a great historical opportunity to achieve such a settlement based on the freely expressed wishes of the people of East Timor. The United States should work with its allies to make clear to the new government that a speedy resolution to the East Timor problem through the good offices of the United Nations would be to the benefit of all.

As an initial step, we believe that the new Indonesian government should enter into a serous dialogue with the people of East Timor. Bishop Belo has long stated that in order to minimize human rights abuses, there should be an immediate and substantial reduction in the Indonesian military presence in East Timor as well as the granting of freedom of speech and assembly. In its diplomatic exchanges with the Indonesian government, the United States should support these measures, as well as the release of all political prisoners, including resistance leader Xanana Gusmao. The United States should also augment its contributions toward the bolstering of food and medical supplies in East Timor during this uncertain period, which would help avert further harm to a land whose people have already suffered tremendously.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

The Honorable Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie
President of the Republic of Indonesia
Jakarta, Indonesia

Dear Mr. President:

As you know, for many years, there has been increasing concern in the United States, as elsewhere in the world, over the tragic and complex issue of East Timor.

In keeping with your commitment to reform, we believe the time is ripe for the new Indonesian government to enter into a serious dialogue with the people of East Timor, including Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo. Bishop Belo has long stated that in order to minimize human rights abuses, there should

be an immediate and substantial reduction in the Indonesian military presence in East Timor as well as the granting of freedom of speech and assembly. We urge you to carry these measures out, as well as release of political prisoners, including resistance leader Xanana Gusmao, with whom the government might also hold a dialogue.

Finally, but most importantly, there is a great historical opportunity to achieve a just and conciliatory settlement on East Timor. A speedy resolution of the East Timor problem through the good offices of the United Nations, based on the freely expressed wishes of the people of East Timor, would be to the benefit of all. Such a solution would be in the long-term interests of Indonesia's relations with the world community as well as the people of East Timor. It is important to remember, that the United Nations played an important role in Indonesia's struggle for independence in the 1940s and can now play an important role in the East Timor situation.

Tony P. Hall
Frank R. Wolf
Nita M. Lowey
Christopher H. Smith
Tom Lantos
John Edward Porter
Patrick J. Kennedy
Joseph R. Pitts
Barney Frank
Stephen Horn
Thomas Allen
Maurice Hinchey
Dennis Kucinich
Lloyd Doggett
Robert Underwood
David Hobson
Niel Abercrombie
Carolyn Kilpatrick
Henry Waxman
Sherrod Brown
Eleanor Holmes Norton
John Olver
Peter Visclosky
Dan Burton
John Lewis
Constance Morella
Steve Rothman
Michael McNulty
John Spratt
Fortney Pete Stark
Loretta Sanchez
Bobby Rush
Lynn Rivers
Sam Gejdenson

James Oberstar
Sue Kelly
Louise Slaughter
James Traficant
John Conyers, Jr.
David Minge
Eliot Engel
Bart Stupak
Peter DeFazio
Phil English
Carolyn Maloney
Donald Payne
Lynn Woolsey
Nancy Pelosi
William Coyne
Richard Pombo
Harris Fawell
Jose Serrano
Lane Evans
John Moakley
Martin Olav Sabo
James McGovern
John A. Boehner
Martin Meehan
William Delahunt
Brad Sherman
George Miller
Robert Weygand
Eddie Bernice Johnson
Luis Gutierrez
Esteban Edward Torres
Elizabeth Furse
James P. Moran
Bernard Sanders

Leonard L. Boswell
John Tierney
Micheal P. Forbes
Bill Luther
Ted Strickland
Robert Menendez
Barbara Lee
James Greenwood
Howard L. Berman
Julian Dixon
Charles B. Rangel
Sam Farr
Scott L. Klug
Lucille Roybal-Allard
James T. Walsh
Jesse Jackson, Jr.
Anna G. Eshoo
Brian Bilbray
Bennie G. Thompson
David Bonior
Bruce F. Vento
Sidney R. Yates
Bob Clement
Debbie Stabenow
Joseph P. Kennedy, II
Thomas J. Manton
Bill Pascrell, Jr.
David E. Price
Albert Russell Wynn
Robert Wexler
Jerrold Nadler
Elijah E. Cummings
Robert E. Andrews

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